

HISTORY OF DOWNTOWN AURORA

and past planning efforts



Photo from the City of Aurora.

1856 The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad locates its roundhouse and locomotive shop in Aurora. It was the City's largest employer until the 1960s.

1834 Joseph McCarty builds a campfire on Stolp Island and decides to invite his brother and family to join him in settling the land along the Fox River.

1837 A post office is established and the village is named Aurora, after the goddess of the dawn.

1854 West Aurora becomes an incorporated village.

1850 The Aurora Branch Railroad opened on September 2, 1850.

1845 East Aurora becomes an incorporated village.

early 1800s The area now known as downtown Aurora is a Native American village.

1857 East and West Aurora jointly incorporate as the City of Aurora, agreeing to locate most public buildings on or around Stolp Island, in the middle of the river.



1881 The City becomes one of the first cities to use electric lighting, and earns the nickname "City of Lights."

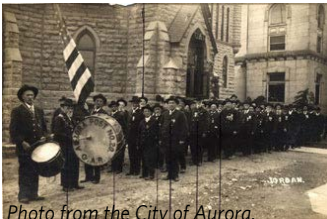


Photo from the City of Aurora.

1878 The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Memorial Hall was completed. The memorial for Civil War veterans fought for veteran's benefits locally and nationally.



1864 The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad constructs a railroad line connecting Aurora to Chicago.



1887 A February flood destroys the original McCarty Mill.



Photo from the Aurora Regional Fire Museum.

1894 The Aurora Fire Department's North Broadway Hose House and Police Patrol building opened.



1903 A fire destroys the original Sencenbaugh store on South Broadway.



1917 The eight-story Aurora Hotel opens on Stolp Island and is the tallest building on the island. It was saved from demolition and renovated in 1996 and now houses senior citizens.

late 1930s The Sky Club atop the Leland Hotel was a popular dance club and famous blues recordings were made here. The Blues on the Fox Festival celebrates Aurora's early blues history.



1928 The Leland building, at 22 stories high, opens as a first-class hotel and entertainment center. It was rumored to be a spot used by Al Capone during Prohibition. It is now an apartment building.

1921 The Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Rail company begins hiring Mexican workers after a 1921 law restricted immigration from Europe. The workers lived in boxcars in Eola, an unincorporated community adjacent to Aurora.

1934 The boxcar community in Eola is closed because many workers were deported back to Mexico during the Great Depression.

late 1910s Cars were first sold and serviced on LaSalle Street in 1907. Between 1912 and 1921, LaSalle Street saw an increase in auto-related businesses from three to fifteen.

1908-1940 Sears Roebuck and Company ordered, manufactured, and sold homes across America, many in Aurora. Aurora currently has 136 authenticated properties, making it one of the largest concentrations of Sears homes in the country.



1931 The Paramount Theatre opens as the first air-conditioned building outside of Chicago.

DOWNTOWN AURORA EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT



1975 Westfield Fox Valley Shopping Mall opens in eastern Aurora.



■ **1974** The Roundhouse and shops close. The structure remains abandoned for 21 years.



■ **1978** Riverfront Playhouse is founded. Since its creation, the nonprofit storefront theatre company has produced over 200 shows in downtown Aurora.

■ **1978** Paramount
—○ Theatre reopens after
a major restoration.

1979 Aurora City Council establishes the Preservation Commission to preserve properties that reflect the City's rich history.

 1989 Riverwalk
Commission created.

1985 Amtrak trains stop servicing Aurora.

■ **1990** SciTech Hands on Museum relocates from Naperville to Aurora.

1993 The FoxWalk Overlay District and Design Review Committee established.

1993 The Aurora Downtown
Redevelopment Corporation (ADRC)
begins a strategic planning process
to look at strengths, weaknesses and
opportunities for downtown on the
heels of Hollywood Casino's opening.

1993 The Hollywood Casino opens, bringing a surge in tax revenues for downtown redevelopment projects, which peaked at \$16.2 million in 2002, declining in later years with only \$8.9 million in 2013, and approximately \$7 million in 2014.

1996 The Roundhouse re-opens with a brewpub, restaurant, museum and pavilion by Walter Payton's investment group.

1996 The restored David L. Pierce Art & History Center opens.

1996 The 1st Blues on the Fox festival is held.

■ **2000** Members of the Aurora Council of Neighborhoods and the City initiate a neighborhood planning approach to develop local neighborhood plans.

2012 Construction begins on RiverEdge Park, an idea that emerged from the Seize the Future Master Plan to reconnect the neighborhoods and create an outdoor gathering space.

2011
Greyhound
discontinues bus
service.

■ **2011** The Broadway Series debuts at Paramount Theatre.

2014
The Meyer Ballroom, with seating for over 300, gets a renovation, and returns to the hands of Paramount.

2008 Aurora
hosts GreenTown
conference.

2006 Seize the Future / Invest
Aurora is created following approval
of the STF Downtown Master Plan.
STF is a nonprofit public private
partnership responsible for citywide
economic development.

■ **1993** Quad
County African
American Chamber
of Commerce
formed.

1986 The 1st downtown TIF and SSA districts are established.

1986 Waubesa Community College opens a location on Stolp Island.

■ **1985** Aurora Public Art Commission is established.

■ **1982** Carson Pirie Scott, the last major department store in downtown Aurora, closes.

■ **1983** Pace Bus service starts.

1970 Burlington Northern begins operating commuter rail service on the railroad line from Aurora to Chicago.

1965 The Aurora Civic Center Authority and the Aurora Redevelopment Commission (ACCA/ARC) were established.

■ **1966** Aurora Municipal Airport opens 8 miles west of downtown as a reliever for O'Hare and Midway airports.

While the City of Aurora's population continued to rise, the downtown census tracts saw a decline in population in the 1970s. With the closing of the railroad shops, many other factories and industrial areas relocated or went out of business.

The City's Latino population begins to grow in the 1980s and continues to grow faster than all other demographic groups combined.

